

State Agency Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Communication

Oregon's Employment Support Website: Communicating the Employment First Policy

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Background

In 2009, the state of Oregon adopted its Employment First policy. When Oregon's Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) decided to promote the implementation of this policy, it began by updating its existing employment website. The redesigned website ([http:// www.dhs.state.or.us/dd/supp_emp/](http://www.dhs.state.or.us/dd/supp_emp/)) emphasizes the value of integrated employment over other outcomes, and the importance of building community-wide conversations, with the goal of achieving integrated employment for people with developmental disabilities. The website shares the value of integrated employment with all targeted audiences by highlighting resources and illustrating employment successes. It was also designed to share information on the Oregon's progress and concrete tools to help site users implement employment at the individual job seeker level. The website's new design makes it easy for visitors to find the information they need, and clearly shows DDS's commitment to Employment First.

Implementation

The home page provides a link to Oregon's Employment First policy. This document explains that integrated employment will be valued over other outcomes and will be part of person- centered planning for all individuals receiving adult services. Oregon DDS held forums introducing the Employment First initiative for a wide range of target audiences. This included individuals with disabilities, their friends and families, employment professionals, and employers and

staff from potential partner agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation.

DDS also ran orientation sessions for case managers

to introduce the

initiative. Ideas generated at these forums will soon be posted on the website.

Each target audience has its own page on the website. The page for employers highlights people with disabilities as part of a stable, capable workforce. It also emphasizes that interested employers will meet matched, pre-screened job candidates who, if hired, can be supported by employment specialists as needed at no cost to the employer. For employment professionals, the website offers information on trainings about promising job development strategies. Staff from potential partner agencies can learn about the services available through various organizations throughout the state, and how they can more effectively work together. Individuals with disabilities can find information on supports and accommodations necessary to achieve employment success. Finally, the website features stories of people who received support and resources to find jobs in their communities.

These audience-specific pages are simply designed to maximize information sharing. User feedback has shaped the present site and will continue to do so.

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Impact

One characteristic of states and employment service providers that have strong employment outcomes is that they provide a clear and consistent message about the value of employment. Oregon's website is one part of that strategy for DDS. The website's new structure has made it easier to use at training events and during conversations about employment with individuals, family members, and professionals. Upcoming features include an interactive map with employment outcome data for each region and information on employment support trainings available locally. Detailed information and links for each audience group are constantly updated in order to provide the most relevant content. These ongoing updates contribute to a user-friendly website that helps individuals with developmental disabilities achieve integrated employment.

Suggestions for replication

- » Use your state's DD website to educate and engage readers about employment policy. Oregon's website not only contains the text of the Employment First policy, but provides practical tools and resources that support implementation. The site underscores the benefits of the policy to people with disabilities, employment professionals, and employers.
- » Tell stories that communicate the value of integrated employment. The website contains stories of individuals who found employment in integrated settings. These stories are clear illustrations of what can be achieved through implementing the Employment First policy.
- » Include concrete easy to use data on services that provide a transparent report on how the state is doing, and supports individual users to review and select employment services.

To visit the website, go to:

www.dhs.state.or.us/dd/supp_emp/

**For more information on this practice
contact thinkwork@umb.edu**



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